

President's Report for year-end 2007

1. Introduction.

Colleagues in government and fellow citizens:

I am honored to offer to you my fourth Annual Report as President of the Newton Board of Aldermen. What I am about to say is not news to the members of the Board or many of our guests, but many Newton citizens who watch these proceedings may not fully understand the important role the Board plays in City Government and the many actions we take that affect the quality of life in Newton. Therefore, the purpose of this Report is:

- To inform citizens about the Board's role and describe some of what the Board has done in the last year;
- To highlight some of the issues that the Board of Aldermen will take up this coming year; and
- To acknowledge some of the many valued colleagues in city government who have helped the Board to do its work.

(Because the Report is lengthy, and we have other business tonight, I will not read it in detail, but abstract some of the highlights orally, and I welcome any corrections before a copy of the final version of the full Report is placed on the City's aldermanic web page, which can be accessed by going to www.ci.newton.ma.us.)

2. Background on the Newton Board of Aldermen.

While the Mayor is the Chief Executive of the City, it is worth remembering that the City Charter provides that "...Except as otherwise provided by law or the Charter, all powers of the City shall be vested in the Board of Aldermen...."

So how has the Board exercised its powers during the last year? I will outline that in a moment, but first I want to acknowledge the work of my colleagues in the Board leadership and the staff.

a. The Vice-President.

The Vice-President serves in the absence of the President, but also contributes in other areas. For example, Vice-President **Amy Sangiolo** worked on enhancing the aldermanic web site and the availability of key documents on-line; helped organize Board events; presided over the Board meetings when the Board president served as Acting Mayor; worked with the President Emeritus and the staff to take on the huge task of recodifying the City's Ordinances, and was the principal liaison with the staff of the Clerk of the Board. I again want to thank Amy for her dedication, service, and hard work as vice president, and look forward to working with Scott Lennon as her successor.

b. The President Emeritus.

The President Emeritus presides when the Vice-President is unavailable and also undertakes other tasks as requested by the President. As noted earlier, President Emeritus **Verne Vance** worked

with Alderman Sangiolo on the Recodification Committee. He also chaired the Long Range Planning Committee which worked in conjunction with the Mayor's Office to create a Blue Ribbon Commission to examine the City's Finances. I look forward to working with him again during the coming term.

c. Comptroller, Clerk of the Board and Board staff.

The Board has also been aided by our able City Comptroller, **David Wilkinson**. In 2007, the Comptroller's Office received the Government Finance Officer's Association Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting award for the third consecutive year. The Comptroller's Office web page was expanded to include much important financial information, including copies of all contracts relating to the Newton North project, as well as other documents.

These include complete copies of audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports, Management Letters, and Federal Awards Audit Reports for the years 2001 to 2007; ten years of financial operating trend information; monthly revenue and expenditure budget reports; and weekly Newton North High School new construction financial reports and copies of all contracts related to the project.

The Board has also been aided by our Clerk of the Board and City Clerk, **David Olson**, and his able staff: **Linda Finucane, Rosalie Myers, Christine Owen, Shawna Sullivan, Karyn Dean** and **Danielle Delaney**. Together this team is responsible for much of what we do to help communicate among ourselves, and with the public on behalf of the Board, including helping with this report.

They also assemble the dockets, agendas and reports of items for the Board to consider, prepare the board orders, revise or create new ordinances that result from Board actions, and staff the various Board Committees.

Finally, while the Clerk's staff and the Board officers serve the Board as a whole, the Board does most of its work divided into standing and occasional special committees, all appointed by the President at the beginning of the new term. Because I had announced those appointments at inauguration, I will not repeat them here, but will attach a copy of those remarks as an appendix to this report when it is published in print and on-line. I do, however, want to take a moment to welcome our newest colleagues, Aldermen **Bill Brandel, Allan Ciccone, Jr., John Freedman**, and **Greer Tan Swiston**, to their first working meeting of the Board.

3. The Committees of the Board and their work.

In 2007, the Board of Aldermen tackled many issues that had and will have a significant impact on the City of Newton. The Board worked through more than 500 individual docket items ranging in complexity from Committee and Commission appointments to the authorizations to bond well over \$100 million dollars in construction projects. Some of the more significant items that were acted upon or discussed by the Board of Aldermen in 2007 included the design and funding of a new Newton North High School, a new long-term trash contract, new recreational land acquisitions, an updated comprehensive plan and a new multi-use zoning district, and the advice of a Blue Ribbon Commission on the City's Finances. The work on each of these items began in one of the Board's Committees where

it was reviewed and discussed, and where appropriate, a recommendation was then made to the full Board of Aldermen.

To present complete list of all of the work that each committee undertook this past year would take more time than we have this evening. Instead, I will highlight two or three items of note from each Committee, and introduce the work of these Committees in the order in which they make reports to the Full Board under our Rules.

Land Use Committee

First to report at Board meetings is the **Land Use Committee**, which makes recommendations on zoning special permits for land development. This past year the Committee Chairman was **George Mansfield** and the Vice-Chairman was **Mitch Fischman**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Linda Finucane**.

Expansion of the Whole Foods Parking Lot on Beacon Street.

Early in the year, the Land Use Committee recommended and the Board granted a special permit to the owners of the Whole Foods Market on Beacon Street to allow the alteration and expansion of the present parking lot at the corner of Walnut and Beacon Streets from the current 85 spaces to 122 spaces, all to be used for customer parking.

As any of you who shop at this market know, parking has been a major issue and the request for a special permit was complex one. The Whole Foods parking lot spans portions of 5 different parcels in different zoning districts with 5 separate owners. A portion of the lot is owned by the owner of the building which is leased to Whole Foods. The central portion is owned by the City of Newton and is over the Cochituate Aqueduct. The most easterly portion of the rear part of the lot is owned by the MWRA as part of the right-of-way of the now unused Sudbury Aqueduct. The front portion of the access driveway from Beacon Street is on land owned by an abutting residential property and a triangular parcel at the corner of Beacon and Walnut, formerly occupied by a self-service gas station, will be leased. All of this information was reviewed by the Land Use Committee and the committee provided a recommendation of approval to the full Board to allow the needed expansion.

First Raised Crosswalk at Brimmer and May School.

The Brimmer & May School in Chestnut Hill came before the Land Use Committee in 2007 seeking a special permit to alter and expand its existing parking facility to provide additional on-site parking for parents and visitors because of limited existing land on which to expand. The Board approved the permit, including a raised crosswalk to be installed on Middlesex Road, in return for a new footpath to the T which the School will maintain.

More specifically, the Longwood Covered Courts offered to sell Brimmer & May a portion of its property that abutted the school, but because a city-owned parcel that contains a footpath separated the properties, Brimmer & May proposed to swap the land acquired from Longwood Covered Courts with an adjacent City-owned parcel that contains the footpath to the Chestnut Hill T Station. Brimmer & May would then relocate the footpath onto the land acquired from Longwood Covered Courts. This

simple transaction was complicated by the fact that two changes of zone were required to effect the relocation of the footpath: the City-owned parcel which was zoned Public Use had to be rezoned to Single Residence 1 and the parcel acquired from Longwood Courts by Brimmer & May had to be rezoned from Single Residence 1 to Public Use. The Land Use Committee worked through the issues with the School and also looked at the possibility of redesigning the footpath and including the installation of a new raised crosswalk on Middlesex Road to allow pedestrians to cross to the T station and also to slow traffic on Middlesex Road as a condition of the Special Permit. By including this provision the Board approved the first raised crosswalk in the city, and Brimmer & May agreed to design and fund the installation of that raised crosswalk. Also, as noted below, the relocated City path to the T was redesigned, lighted and plowed at the School's expense.

Parking Waiver for Beth Menachem Chabad on Dedham Street.

The Committee ended the year with a request for a Special Permit Parking Waiver for Beth Menachem Chabad for its new facility to be built on Dedham Street. After a great deal of discussion, public comment, and careful review, the Board of Aldermen granted this Special Permit to waive the parking requirements, which included a number of conditions to protect the surrounding neighborhood.

What complicated the discussion of this item was that as a religious institution, the Beth Menachem Chabad was able, under state zoning law, to seek a waiver from Newton's Commissioner of Inspectional Services to build a building that was larger than would have otherwise been allowed. The Board of Aldermen's role was then to grant or deny a waiver of the required number of parking spaces. The Chabad planned to provide only 9 of the required 70 spaces for a building of this proposed size and use. After a great deal of discussion and debate, the Board of Aldermen approved the special permit subject to a number of conditions including the Chabad's submittal of a final Parking Management Plan and the designation of a parking manager who will respond to neighborhood concerns.

The work of the Land Use Committee was supported by many city staff members, including Associate City Solicitor **Ouida Young**, Chief Planner **Candace Havens** who replaced Chief Planner **Nancy Radzevich** in 2007, Associate City Engineer **John Daghljan**, and Traffic Engineer **Clint Schuckel**.

Zoning and Planning Committee

Next is the **Zoning and Planning Committee**, in charge of writing and revising our zoning and historic ordinances. The Committee's Chairman was **Brian Yates**, and the Vice-chairman was **Cheryl Lappin**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Linda Finucane**.

Approval of the Newton Comprehensive Plan.

The Board's Zoning and Planning Committee heard testimony on, reviewed, and the Board adopted a new Comprehensive Plan for the City the City of Newton.

The plan was developed by a Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) made up of residents of Newton appointed by Mayor Cohen in the spring of 2002 and led by citizen, and planner, Phil Herr. CPAC worked with Newton's Planning and Development Department to complete the draft

and submitted it to the Board of Aldermen, as required by City Charter. The draft Comprehensive Plan includes many issues affecting the future of Newton including land use, economic development, open space, and facilities and services. After several special meetings by the Zoning and Planning Committee to review the lengthy plan and to receive public comment, the Committee made its recommendation for approval of an amended version to the full Board which passed late in the term.

Zoning Changes to allow Planned Multi-Use Business Districts.

A second major item that the Zoning & Planning Committee reviewed and the Board passed was a proposed amendment to the zoning ordinances allowing the creation of a Planned Multi-Use Business District, or PMBD, to allow by special permit the mixed use and design of large tracts of land in certain business districts that meet minimum criteria.

The discussions opened with a public hearing on the proposed amendment in March of 2007 and over the balance of the year, discussion and debate on this important amendment continued. Once the committee finished its work and recommended approval, the item came to the full Board where additional amendments and recommendations were offered. The final PMBD Ordinance was passed by the Board at its last meeting of 2007.

The work of the Zoning and Planning Committee was supported by many City staff members including Assistant City Solicitor **Marie Lawlor**, Chief Zoning Code Official **Juris Alksnitis**, and Director of Planning & Development **Mike Kruse**.

Programs and Services Committee

The **Programs and Services Committee** looks after Newton's Schools, our Parks and Recreation Facilities, and our Library, as well as our Aldermanic Rules and staff. Last term, the Chairman was **Marcia Johnson** and the Vice-Chairman **Ted Hess-Mahan**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Karyn Dean**.

Resident Alien Voting Rights requested.

In February of 2007, the Programs and Services Committee discussed authorizing the Mayor to submit home rule petition to the general court for special legislation to allow certain Newton residents who are not citizens to vote in local elections.

Specifically, citizen residents of the city of Newton who are aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States, and who meet all of the qualifications for registering to vote except U.S. citizenship, would be eligible to apply to have their names entered on a register of qualified permanent resident alien voters and vote in any election for local offices and local ballot questions.

Synthetic Turf and Drainage Discussion for Newton South High School Playing Fields.

The Programs & Services Committee, in conjunction with the Public Facilities and Finance Committees, continued the discussion of the installation of synthetic turf at the Newton South High

School athletic complex, deciding to hold off full funding until underlying drainage and other issues can be addressed.

The Committees held a joint meeting on September 5 for residents to express their support for or concerns about the project. At the meeting, Newton residents spoke both in favor of, and in opposition to, the project. Comments by residents included concern about potential health issues, the environmental impact of synthetic turf, area drainage, installation and long term maintenance costs, and the importance of parity for Newton South High School with the upcoming new Newton North High School. Understanding the necessity of finding a solution for the very poor conditions of the fields, but noting the area's historic drainage problems, the recommendation was to solve the drainage problems with the site before moving forward with new fields. The Mayor submitted a subsequent request for the funds to conduct a drainage study of the site, and the Board approved the funds.

Off-Leash Dog Parks enabled.

In the October of 2007, the Programs and Services Committee considered and the Board approved the creation of an ordinance to allow some areas, subject to safeguards, to be proposed for use by dogs off leash.

At the meeting on the proposal, residents expressed many opinions including the need for dogs to have the opportunity to exercise and socialize with each other in a safe way. Others expressed the desire to have the public educated through pamphlets and signs on the rules and regulations of the dog parks. There was also some support for having some or all of the designated off-leash areas fenced in. After deliberation, the Committee approved a proposed ordinance allowing dog owners to have their dogs off leash on certain City-owned properties to be designated under rules governed by the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Conservation Commission. The Ordinance would also establish an advisory Committee to advise the commissions on rules and regulations, and establish a 2-year trial period that would end with an evaluation and recommendation on whether to continue, change or end the program. After a lengthy discussion, including clarifying some sites as not available for this purpose, the Board approved the ordinance.

Reducing the size of the Board of Aldermen.

The Board examined again the issue of reducing its size. It ultimately became clear in the Programs and Services Committee discussion, confirmed at the full Board, that no clear plan to reduce the Board would emerge that could gain the necessary majority Board support in order to file a petition with the legislature for a statutory change to the Charter to allow the reduction to occur.

Some Aldermen also felt that in light of the lack of consensus on this issue, the size of the Board was one of the issues which might be examined by a Charter Commission, should one be formed, to examine the future structure of Newton government.

Smoking ban around Newton North High School.

In response to requests from Newton North administrators, teachers, and students, the Committee recommended, and the Board approved, a ban on smoking near the High School.

Ban on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers and Updates to the Noise Ordinance Discussed.

The Committee also considered a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers in the City, with the issue to be continued this term, along with updates in the City's Noise ordinances.

The discussion in the Programs and Services Committee on a proposed ban on leaf blowers in has led to national attention, including a broadcast segment on the National Public Radio program, All Things Considered. The Programs and Services Committee conducted a public meeting on September 19, at which many residents testified both for and against both the ban and possible changes in the City's ordinances to require quieter equipment or specifically allowed hours of operation. An early show of hands indicated an equal division of opinion among those attending the meeting. Individual speakers in favor of the ban expressed their frustration over the noise and pollution generated by the machines, and argued for cleaner, quieter alternatives for lawn work. Opponents, many of whom were in the landscaping business, said that the changes would be detrimental to them as homeowners and to their landscaping enterprises, with increased costs likely for their customers. Some members of the Committee indicated that based on the comments received, they would be willing to explore alternatives to an outright ban which might still produce a quieter and less dusty result.

The Committee relied on many city staff, including individuals from the Parks and Recreation Department, including Commissioner **Fran Towle** and **Carol Stapleton**; from the Law Department City Solicitor **Dan Funk** and Associate Solicitor **Gayle Smalley**, and Assistant Solicitor **Marie Lawlor**; from the Health Department Commissioner **David Naparstek**; and also members of the **School Committee**.

Public Safety and Transportation Committee

The **Public Safety and Transportation Committee** is next. It oversees the Police and Fire Departments as well as traffic and parking ordinances. The Public Safety Committee Chairman this past year was **Christine Samuelson** and its Vice-Chairman was **Jay Harney**. The Public Safety Chairman also serves as a member of the Traffic Council. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Christine Owen**.

All-Night Winter Parking Ban Shortened.

The Public Safety and Transportation Committee looked at the winter all-night parking ban, recommending it be shorted by two weeks at either end, which the Board approved.

After review, the Committee determined that snowfalls were not significant in November or April and that a shortening of the ban would help those residents in the city who do not have access to a driveway. The Committee therefore recommended, and the Board approved, the reduction in time with the ban beginning on November 15, two weeks later, and ending on April 15, two weeks earlier, giving Newton residents an additional month of overnight parking without a ticket.

Purchase of new Fire Engine.

In the Fall of 2007, within days of the Mayor's request to purchase a new fire engine, the Public Safety and Transportation Committee reviewed and recommended approval of the request, as well as the approval of an Emergency Preamble to allow the purchase to be made forthwith. The Board and the Finance Committee agreed.

The new engine became the first line engine at the Newton Highlands Fire Station, allowing current engine #7 to be put on reserve status. The purchase of the new engine also allowed the retirement of Engine #13, a reserve engine which injured Lt. Geary and was damaged beyond repair, as well as maintained the City's compliance with ISO fire safety equipment standards. The Board also approved a resolution to the Mayor asking him to treat firefighters and other city employees equitably in terms of sick leave.

Changes to the Traffic Council.

The Public Safety and Transportation Committee played a key role in drafting an ordinance that modified the process for handling site-specific parking and traffic items, giving the Traffic Council more authority to make decisions through an administrative process rather than through action by the Board of Aldermen.

The Committee discussed the merits of the proposed ordinance, including whether an administrative process for handling site-specific parking and traffic matters was simpler, more efficient, and more professional than the system of Traffic Council recommendations followed by Board enactment or committal to the Public Safety Committee. The Committee also discussed the right of appeal to the Board of Aldermen for site-specific decisions of the Traffic Council and the delegation of regulatory authority to this administrative body. The full Board approved this proposal in December and this change is in the process of being effected.

The Committee was supported by staff from the Public Works Department, Traffic Engineer **Clint Schuckel**; from the Police Department, including Police Chief **John J. O'Brien**, Capt. **Matthew Cummings** and Officer **Paul Bianchi**; the Fire Department, including Fire Chief **Joseph LaCroix**; and the City Solicitor's Office, including City Solicitor **Dan Funk**, Associate City Solicitor **Gayle Smalley**, and Assistant Solicitors **Catherine Farrell** and **Marie Lawlor**.

Traffic Council actions:

The Board of Aldermen was represented on the Traffic Council in 2007 by Alderman **Christine Samuelson** who joined City Traffic Engineer **Clint Schuckel**, Newton Resident **Candace Havens** (chair of the Council), Transportation Planner **David Koses**, and Sgt. **James Norcross** of the Newton Police Department's Traffic Division, to review site-specific traffic and parking issues and report its findings and recommendations to the Board of Aldermen for final approval. The Council was supported by Committee Clerks **Rosalie Myers** and **Christine Owen**.

Parking Plan during the Construction of Newton North High School

One of the major items before the Traffic Council in 2007 was the creation of a temporary parking permit program around Newton North High School to be in effect during the construction of the new school.

Due to construction, on-site parking at Newton North High School is very limited. To alleviate this problem, the Board of Aldermen approved the Traffic Council's recommendation to create a temporary permit parking program that is intended to balance the need for staff and students to park within walking distance of NNHS while distributing the parking throughout the surrounding neighborhood streets, to ensure that emergency vehicle access is not compromised, and minimize the burden imposed on the residents living in the neighborhood. The parking permit program is known as the Tiger Parking Program and started in September 2007 at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year. The program will end when construction is complete and on-site parking is again made available for staff and students, as determined by the principal of Newton North High School.

Traffic Improvements at Commonwealth Avenue and Washington Street

In 2007, the Traffic Council reviewed, and the Board of Aldermen approved, funds to design traffic improvements to the intersection of Commonwealth Avenue and Washington Street.

The City's Traffic Engineer pointed out that at rush hour it is very difficult to keep traffic moving safely through this intersection, especially for cars traveling westbound on Route 16 and turning left onto Commonwealth Avenue. Due to the difficulty of making a left-hand turns at this intersection, motorists are using neighborhood streets, such as Aspen Avenue and Woodland Road, to cut through to avoid the intersection. It is anticipated that the final plan will contain modifications to the traffic signals and lane configurations in order to facilitate left-hand turns and to safely alleviate traffic congestion safely.

Public Facilities Committee

The **Public Facilities Committee** is involved in roads, trash collection, snow plowing, water & sewer service, utility lines, and public buildings, including new or renovated schools. The Chairman of the Public Facilities Committee this past year was **Sydra Schnipper** and the Vice-chairman, **Anthony Salvucci**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Shawna Sullivan**.

Funding for New Bulbs for the Streetlights to conserve energy

Early in 2007 the Public Facilities Committee approved the funding for the replacement of 8,440 streetlights with more energy efficient fixtures.

The Committee discussed the options with city staff and several members of the Energy Commission. The Energy Commission strongly supported the replacement of the bulbs, as they will conserve energy and reduce the cost of powering streetlights. The City uses 8 million kilowatt hours per year at a cost of 15¢ per kilowatt-hour. The proposed high-pressure sodium lights will be a more efficient lighting choice and the new bulbs will pay for themselves within three years. The City's

current mercury vapor lights will be banned in 2008 due to the concern that they contain quantities of mercury. The new streetlights will include replacement of the arm of each light with a new fixture containing a flat head that concentrates the light in a downward direction.

Funding to complete Construction Drawings for new Newton North High School.

With the vote to approve the Newton North High School Site Plan by Newton voters in January of 2007, the Board of Aldermen voted in February to authorize funds totaling \$2,572,500 to pay for the completion of the plans and development of construction drawings for the new building, along with other costs involved in readying the project for construction. The Public Facilities Committee also played a major role in reviewing various aspects of the Newton North project.

For example, the original design included an HVAC system that placed equipment on the roof of the building and mounted in the gyms. This type of system is fairly efficient and is one of the top performing systems over a 25-year life-cycle in terms of cost, but with some drawbacks. One of the biggest problems is the need for a great deal of acoustical mitigation added to the roofs to keep the noise levels from impacting the grounds and the surrounding neighborhood. The Design Review Committee and the Aldermen considered an even more efficient central heating and cooling system in which some of the equipment would go into the basement. This type of system is quieter and will not require much acoustical mitigation on the roof since the noisy mechanicals are below ground. Additionally, this system evidently has a very good 25-year, and even better 50-year, life-cycle cost. The addition of the central HVAC system does add a cost premium to the building over the initial system, but eventually the city saves more money in the long run due to the greater operating efficiency.

Another issue of the Site Plan receiving attention from the Public Facilities Committee was a change to the layout of Elm Road, which has been suggested to be made one way to allow better bus and parent drop off.

Originally designed as a street to be used only by buses during the school day, the Board of Aldermen approved the site plan with the condition that Elm Road be further studied. The architects have designed several circulation patterns on the site to open up Elm Road to cars, allowing parents and students to access the site from Lowell Avenue. The configuration currently under discussion makes Elm Road one-way from Lowell Avenue to Walnut Street. The change allows the school buses to line up along Elm Road closer to Walnut Street, putting them much closer to the school entry than the original plan and allowing the buses to stop without impeding traffic. Under this configuration, in addition to drop-off points on Hull and Lowell, parents could drop off and pick up their children on Elm Road closer to Lowell Avenue and continue out to Walnut Street, without conflicting with the school busses. The accessible vans and athletic buses would pick up and drop off at the east entry off Walnut Street. There will also be a number of places located around the site where parents can drop off and pick up their children to spread the traffic burden to all four sides of the site. Finally, this new pattern also allows for a few more parking spaces and a larger planting area to screen the north entry from the residential neighborhood.

Funding the Design of Repairs to Fire Station #4.

In June, the Public Facilities Committee, in conjunction with the Finance Committee, reviewed the Mayor's request to approve funds for the design, project management and testing of repairs to Fire

Station #4. This is the first step in what is hoped to be a complete updating and repair of all of Newton's fire stations.

The Public Facilities Committee heard the proposed plans from Building Commissioner Nick Parnell. The request includes funds for a project manager, design and testing. Station #4 was chosen as the first station to be renovated by the Fire Chief, and the Commissioner agreed with him, because it is the logical choice as the roof and windows are already being replaced at the station. The renovation will move forward the whole process of bringing the fire stations up to code. Once a design is in place, the Committee looks forward to reviewing the design and making its recommendation to the Board on undertaking the work in 2008, followed by other fire stations in the future.

Trash Disposal and Collection Contracts.

The Public Facilities and Finance Committees met in 2007 to discuss the authorization of two multi-year trash related contracts. The first contract is a twenty-year contract for the actual disposal of Newton's trash. This disposal contract is similar to the current contract, with the company and disposal method remaining the same. The trash will be disposed of through a burn for energy process at a facility located in Millbury, Massachusetts. After reviewing the proposed contract, both the Public Facilities and Finance Committees were in favor of entering into the disposal contract and the full Board of Aldermen agreed with its recommendation.

The second contract has required more discussion and is for the actual collection of trash within the City of Newton. The contract under discussion will change the method of trash collection from a manual system to an automated collection system. The automated system will require residents to use a barrel that the trash truck will mechanically lift, dump, and replace on the curbside. Public Comment on the collection contract was held at the end of the year, and both the Public Facilities and Finance Committees have discussed the item. The Board will continue its discussions, beginning tonight after these remarks, in hopes of finding a solution to trash collection that will meet the needs of every Newton resident.

The work of the Public Facilities Committee was supported by Public Buildings Commissioner **Nick Parnell**, Acting Public Works Commissioner **David Turocy**, City Engineer **Lou Taverna**, and from the Mayor's Office, **Sandy Pooler** and **Susan Burstein**.

Finance Committee

The **Finance Committee** determines if and how we can pay for all of the city services and capital improvements. The Finance Committee's Chairman was **Paul Coletti** and its Vice-chairman was **Scott Lennon**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Christine Owen**.

Financing the New Newton North High School

In March, the Finance Committee, as well as the Programs and Services and Public Facilities Committees, discussed Mayor Cohen's financing plan of \$131 million for the new Newton North High School. After careful deliberation, each committee recommended approval of the request and the Board

approved it. The financing plan includes City bonding, supplemented by a \$46.5 million dollar grant and a \$15 million dollar low interest loan from the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Budget Review, tax rate setting and financial policies.

One of the major items that the Finance Committee undertakes each year is to lead the review of the Mayor's proposed budget. In 2007, the Mayor presented the FY08 budget which did not include any major cuts and highlighted three initiatives that will be undertaken during the fiscal year: a new city phone call system to alert residents about emergencies and has already been initiated, enhancements to the Newton Free Library, and the addition of a new construction crew for the Department of Public Works. The Board approved the budget with limited modifications.

Through its committees, the Board reviewed the budget and met with department heads to learn about each department's accomplishments during the past fiscal year, and to review the department goals and budget for the coming year. By City Charter, the Board has just 45 days to complete its review of the budget or the Mayor's budget is approved as proposed. The Board may not add funds to what has been proposed, but it may cut specific items or amounts. The Board may also send resolutions to the Mayor requesting that he consider specific increases. This past year, the Aldermen sent several resolutions to the Mayor, including requests to add positions to the Information Technology Department, Planning Department, Public Buildings Department, and School Librarians. The Mayor chose not to add these positions to the budget, stating resource constraints.

The Capital Improvement Plan was also discussed as part of the budget process, and a public hearing held in conjunction with the review drew a large contingent of fire fighters concerned about the state of their equipment and fire stations.

Testimony was heard from the firefighters in regards to the age of the City's fire trucks and the general state of the department's equipment. Aldermen sent several resolutions to the Mayor regarding the Capital Improvement Plan, including a request that the Mayor continue to work with the Board to develop a comprehensive funding plan to address the capital needs of the Newton Fire Department.

The Finance Committee Chairman also led the Board's vote in setting of the tax rate which this year resulted in a small residential increase compared to commercial properties. The Committee also considered a draft of financial policies and procedures which Comptroller David Wilkinson originally drafted and has been worked into a revised set of financial guidelines with the Mayor to be considered early in 2008.

The work of the Finance Committee was supported in 2007 by Comptroller **David Wilkinson**, Treasurer/Collector **Ed Spellman**, Chief Budget Officer **Susan Burstein**, Chief Administrative Officer **Sandy Pooler**, Director of Assessment **Elizabeth Dromey**, and City Solicitor **Dan Funk**, with his staff Associate City Solicitor **Ouida Young** and Assistant City Solicitor **Donnalyn Khan**.

Real Property Reuse Committee

The **Real Property Reuse Committee** reviews the sale or lease of City property. Its Chairman was **Rick Lipof**; and its Vice-chairman was **Len Gentile**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Linda Finucane**.

In 2007, the Real Property Reuse Committee worked in conjunction with the Land Use Committee, and had a significant role in, two items reported earlier in this report.

The first item was the lease of city-owned land over the Cochituate Aqueduct for the Whole Foods Parking Lot. Although the work of the Real Property Reuse Committee was completed in 2006, the work of the Land Use committee would not have moved forward without this Committee's earlier work on the lease and the Board's subsequent approval.

The members of the Real Property Reuse Committee reviewed the lease agreement with the owners of the Whole Foods Market Building and determine an appropriate amount for the lease. A price per space with an escalator linked to the Consumer Price Index was recommended by the Committee and approved by the full Board.

The second item was the swap of City Land with an outmoded footpath for a new footpath to the Chestnut Hill T station, which the Board also approved.

The committee recommended the swap after finding that the improved handicapped accessible footpath with new lighting and landscaping and the raised crosswalk as well as the addition of 11 parking spaces on the Brimmer & May site, removing cars and lessening congested on Middlesex Road, are all beneficial to the City. The Real Property Reuse Committee recommended that the Board authorize the Mayor to swap the surplus city-owned parcel with Brimmer & May School for the parcel it will acquire from Longwood Covered Courts.

The work of the Real Property Reuse Committee was supported by Assistant City Solicitor **Eileen McGettigan**.

Post Audit and Oversight Committee

The **Post Audit and Oversight Committee** reviews the work of city departments to see if what was promised has in fact been achieved. Its Chairman was **Carleton Merrill** and vice-chairman was **Susan Albright**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Shawna Sullivan**.

One of the major items that the Post Audit and Oversight Committee worked on in 2007 was a review with the Programs and Services Committee of the policies and procedures of the Election Department following the miscount of referendum signatures that occurred around the Newton North High School Citizen Petition. The objective was to insure that all signatures are accounted for in any future such petition.

The Post Audit and Oversight Committee reviewed with appropriate individuals the procedures for counting petition signatures as well as the procedures for a referendum. A resolution was sent to the

Mayor to ask the Interim Executive Secretary of the Election Commission to advise the Chairmen of the Post Audit and Programs & Services Committees, and through them the Board of Aldermen and the citizens of Newton, of any and all policies and procedures which have been or are anticipated to be developed and/or implemented to assure that all valid signatures are accounted for when citizens submit signatures to the Commission or the City Clerk for verification as registered voters of the City of Newton.

Committee on Community Preservation

Finally, **The Committee on Community Preservation**, which recommends how we spend funds for open space, affordable housing, recreation and historic preservation generated by one per cent of property taxes paid in the City matched by state funds raised under the Community Preservation Act. The Committee Chairman was **Steve Linsky** and vice-chairman was **Ken Parker**. The Committee was supported by Committee Clerk **Karyn Dean**.

Rogers Street Property next to Crystal Lake

In 2007, Mayor Cohen and the Community Preservation Committee docketed a request with the Board of Aldermen to take the property at 20 Rogers Street next to Crystal Lake by Eminent Domain with funds from the Community Preservation Act in order to expand the recreational opportunities at Crystal Lake.

The request was reviewed by the Committee on Community Preservation in conjunction with the Finance Committee. The Mayor chose to use eminent domain since it would allow the city to clear the governmental liens with the IRS and State through negotiated agreements and commitment letters. The Mayor and City Solicitor made it clear that the approval of \$2.3 million of public money would not be 'harnessed' with outstanding government, or non-government, liens and the State and the Internal Revenue Service provided those assurances. The Board reviewed the Committee on Community Preservation's recommendation and authorized the Mayor to pay the appraised fair market value of \$2.3 million for the property. The Committee, along with the Programs and Services Committee, also recommended additional funding for an additional property next door at 230 Lake Avenue, currently pending before the Finance Committee.

The Durant Kenrick Homestead Project.

The Durant Kenrick Homestead project was proposed by the Newton Historical Society and came to the Committee on Community Preservation in two separate phases in 2007 of \$1.4 and 1.27 million respectively, which the Board approved, to allow the Newton Historical Society to conserve and preserve the 1732 Durant Kenrick Homestead located on Waverley Avenue.

The first part was to approve the expenditure of \$1.4 million in Community Preservation Funds. The Durant Kenrick Homestead is one of only a few pre-Revolutionary houses remaining in Newton. The interior and exterior are in near original condition, it is fully furnished with period furniture and other collections, and is surrounded by specimen trees that were planted by one of the first horticulturists in the country. The objective of the project is to restore, and ultimately preserve, the Homestead for current and future Newton citizens and students to visit, learn from and enjoy. The Committee on

Community Preservation then considered the Phase 2 component of the project, which is to purchase a preservation restriction on the Homestead lot next to the house itself to assure the preservation of the Homestead in its entirety. The \$1.27 million in funds that were requested will be used to purchase a preservation restriction on the open lot that sits adjacent to the Durant Kenrick Homestead, thus assuring that the setting for the Homestead will be preserved along with the house itself. The funds will be paid to the Newton Historical Society in return for the restriction. Rather than use the funds for other purposes, as might a private landowner, the Society plans to use some of the proceeds from the sale to put back into the facility to assure its long-term operational success. The funds approved in this phase, along with the previously approved Phase 1 funds which will be used for the preservation and renovation of existing structures on the property, the construction of a classroom, and the addition of handicapped access in the rear of the building, are both contingent on the Newton Historical Society raising nearly \$1 million in matching funds. If the Historical Society can not raise the \$1 million, the CPA funds will not be released.

Purchase of 30 Wabasso Street.

In October, the Board of Aldermen accepted the Committee on Community Preservation's recommendation to acquire the property at 30 Wabasso Street to add to the City's Flowed Meadow Conservation Area.

The 30 Wabasso Street parcel is small, but critical to the area as it is close to the waterline and has direct access to a view of the cove. It has been a part of the City's plan to reclaim the surrounding ecosystem and buy all of the private properties dotted along Wabasso Street. The Community Preservation Committee noted that this land, due to its location, represented an example of progressive city stewardship and will be an amenity for the neighborhood and the City.

City Staff who helped the Committee on Community Preservation include Community Preservation Committee staff member **Alice Ingerson**, Comptroller **David Wilkinson**, City Solicitor **Dan Funk**, Associate City Solicitor **Catherine Farrell**, Parks and Recreation Commissioner **Fran Towle** and **Carol Stapleton**.

Long Range Planning Committee

The **Special Committee on Long Range Planning** investigates how the Board can improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Its Chairman was President Emeritus **Verne Vance** and Vice-Chairman was **Vicki Danberg**.

The Board of Aldermen and the Blue Ribbon Commission.

The Long Range Planning Committee focused its efforts in 2007 on the City's long range finances and evaluating the City's long range financial needs. In 2006, the Committee, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, was instrumental in convening a Blue Ribbon Commission, comprised of local financial professionals over half of whom were nominated by members of the Board, to take a hard look at future needs and how the City could meet those financial needs. Early in 2007, the Commission concluded its work and issued its report and the Committee has continued work on such issues as the long range forecast.

In February 2007, the Board of Aldermen, in an unusual Committee of the Whole, met with members of the Blue Ribbon Commission to discuss the Commission's report and to have a conversation with commission members on the recommendations that were made. The full report was discussed and Commission members provided additional information on how its forecast differed from the City forecast, the impact that some of the recommendations would have on City finances, and an overview of why they chose not to consider some items that had been suggested. Board members had the opportunity to ask Commission members some questions and Commission members had the opportunity to discuss the reasons for their recommendations. In June, a joint statement was made by the Mayor's Office and the President of the Board that the two would work cooperatively in a joint effort to address issues highlighted in the Blue Ribbon Commission's report including the structural deficit in the City's long range financial future and deferred maintenance of the City's capital facilities. Mayor Cohen agreed to take several steps including: directing City and School officials to identify areas that have been adversely affected by past budget cuts; to look at activities that would be adversely affected if revenues are not sufficient over the next five years; and to update the five-year financial forecast. For the Board, I agreed to have the appropriate Board committees discuss the implications of the information provided, including seeking further input from the Board and the public as appropriate, as well as the best next steps.

4. Some things to come.

When I was seeking re-election as President, I indicated that there are some things that I wanted to accomplish during this new term. They included:

- Helping the Board get its work done efficiently and effectively, including working to help all of us contribute in positive ways to each other's success.
- Improving communication among us, to and from the Mayor, and with the public we serve.
- Enhancing the role of the Board as an equal partner in Newton government in the challenging times to come.

For example, in terms of our own efficiency and effectiveness, we need to

- Continue to prioritize in order to spend our limited time on the major issues before the city and less time on the minor ones. This might include finding ways to expedite the first call process at Board meetings, allowing more time to spend on those items that need further discussion.
- Seek to have all material documents or reports for a Friday packet or meeting agenda available to the Clerk of the Board by the close of business on Thursday.
- Strengthen the work of not only the regular standing committees, but also those committees that enable us to look back to see how we can learn from our mistakes, such as Post Audit and Oversight, and plan for the future, such as Long-Range Planning.

For example, in terms of communication, we need to

- Continue to improve Aldermanic communication with the public, including continued improvements to the Aldermen's webpages, and greater use of the resources of NewTV.
- Encourage the Mayor to build upon and continue the conversation he began with the Board last term to engage in more direct communication between the Board and the Executive Offices. The upcoming visit by the Mayor to the Chairmen's meeting on the 16th is an early example.
- See how we can help implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan, especially in the area of neighborhood planning for Newton's future.

In terms of making the Board an equal partner with the Executive in the work to come, we need to

- Seek an appropriate complementary role for members of the Board in public events at which the Executive Department is represented.
- Determine ways the Board can be an effective partner with the Executive Department in the budget process to assure wise use of public funds.

For example, in a project of the scale of Newton North High School, the City will need to have the resources not only to fund and to manage the project well, a continuing concern, but also to preserve the time and attention of the key staff to attend to regular responsibilities. Here the appointment of Alderman Gentile to join Alderman Schnipper as aldermanic participants in the new high school project team meetings is an important step. In a similar vein, we need to clarify with the Mayor a schedule of capital improvements beyond the Newton North High School project in order to make sure that the City's fire stations, schools and public buildings are repaired and maintained.

- Prepare for the Proposition 2.5 tax limitation override request which the Mayor has indicated will be forthcoming soon.

This list is not exhaustive, and we welcome other ideas for making the Board of Aldermen more efficient and effective to serve the citizens of Newton.

Finally, we are clearly entering challenging times. I am mindful however of the basic idea on which our government was founded: e pluibus unum. It could apply to our Board and Newton as a whole: out of many, One.

If we can all work together, we can maintain and enhance the excellence in City services and education that is Newton's hallmark.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted, R. Lisle Baker
President